

SUMMARY

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THE GOTHIC REVIVAL CHARACTER OF ECCLESIASTICAL STAINED GLASS IN BRITAIN

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Stained glass was transformed from a Georgian curiosity at the beginning of the nineteenth century into an essential component of church architecture by the middle years of the century, effecting a transition from the practice of painting in enamels on rectangular sheets of glass to the adoption of the medieval mosaic method. Its rise in popularity was closely intertwined with the Gothic Revival, as architects sought to recreate and reinvent medieval church interiors enriched by imagery and colour.

The changing styles and forms of art and architecture from the Romanesque, in the eleventh century, to the Perpendicular of the sixteenth century, were adopted and sometimes combined, just as larger medieval churches often accumulated architectural features from different periods. The work of Thomas Rickman and Charles Winston helped to classify and develop a chronology of medieval architecture and of its stained glass, making a more scholarly adaptation of medieval forms possible. The work of David Evans is instructive as it demonstrates the selective adoption of Gothic elements for stained glass in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, as well as the refutation of the ecclesiological consensus on the superiority of the earlier medieval styles in the 1850s.

Changing preferences for different medieval styles for stained glass design is clearly discernible in the second half of the nineteenth century, as the fashion for thirteenth- and fourteenth-century styles in the 1840s and 50s gave way to a preference for models more in keeping with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century stained glass. Debates over the need to return to medieval methods and the appropriateness of certain periods and styles marked the 1840s and 50s, but considerable variety and diversification followed. Gothic Revival stained glass in the second half of the nineteenth century included windows that were less imitative of medieval styles and adopted Gothic ornament in a rather superficial way, while other makers adopted a more scholarly approach, producing more accurate reproductions of medieval styles. Gothic elements of stained glass design were not only a feature of nineteenth-century stained glass, as medievalist tendencies continued to characterise most stained glass made for churches well into the twentieth century, and even when this was not the case, a continued reverence for medieval stained glass permeated those involved in making stained glass for churches long after the end of what is now known as the period of the Gothic Revival.